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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants:

Argentine Ambassador Lucio Alberto Garcia del Solar

Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs
Elliott Abrams

Date and Time:

December 3, 1982, 1:00 p.m.

Place:

The Jockey Club, Ritz-Carleton Hotel
Washington, D.C.

There were two main topics, certification and the question of the disappeared. As to certification, the Ambassador asked where things stood. He said he thought Argentina on the facts deserved certification. When I mentioned setbacks such as the recent Calvi statement on "the mothers of terrorists" or some closing of magazines, he acknowledged them. But the Ambassador noted that there were always going to be some of the minor incidents while the army was in power. The overall trend, however, was enormously positive. He certainly hoped Argentina would not be denied certification simply because of Chile. Certification would help both ^{our} countries. He pointed out in particular that while older Argentine military men have close ties to America and are willing to put the Falklands War behind them, this was not true of the younger military. They have fewer ties to the U.S. and reacted with much greater hostility to our support for the U.K. It is important to draw them into relations with the U.S. military, he said.

I responded that in principle I agreed that today's facts would permit certification of Argentina. We would of course prefer to certify Argentina and Chile together, as this would not open us up to accusations of turning to one side or the other. The Ambassador asked whether we would not at some point have to make a final decision on Chile and proceed with Argentina; how long could this drag on? I told him I thought we would be making these decisions at around the end of the year and that whatever the decision on Chile I did not see any obstacle right now to an eventual certification of Argentina, within the next few months. However, this conclusion assumed that there was no change in today's facts. For example, if the army opened fire on a demonstration or if there were a coup, this would change the current situation. If there are no changes in the situation, if the human rights situation continues to progress, I did not see an insurmountable obstacle to certification

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within a few months.

I asked the Ambassador how the question of the disappeared would affect future political developments. How, ultimately, would a compromise be reached between the military and the parties? He replied that there was no clear answer. However, he was somewhat optimistic for in private discussions the political leaders were much more sensible and realistic than they were in public speeches. So perhaps a compromise could be reached which would satisfy everyone. On this issue, the military is absolutely united and determined to avoid widespread and vengeful punishment for its acts. One element of a compromise would be for the government to tell everything it could about the fate of individuals, even if there were no investigation into how they had reached that fate.

I raised with the Ambassador the question of children in this context, such as children born to prisoners or children taken from their families during the dirty war. While the disappeared were dead, these children were alive and this was in a sense the gravest humanitarian problem. The Ambassador agreed completely and had already made this point to his foreign minister and president. They had not rejected his view but had pointed out the problem of, for example, taking children from adoptive parents. I suggested that that problem might be handed over to the Church or to a commission which included the Church, doctors, etc. Action with respect to these children would have enormous humanitarian and political content. Again the Ambassador said he was in complete agreement and would raise this point once more with his capital.

I asked the Ambassador what he foresaw for Argentina after next fall's elections. He said he had some optimism that democratic traditions could be established. He did not share the new sentiment in Argentina that elections were a magical panacea to Argentina's problems. However, he felt the nation had learned much from the cycle of terrorism, military violence, repression, and so on. Finally the terrible defeat in the war had brought the nation into a head-on crash with reality. He hoped this would lead people to act with somewhat more responsibility in politics. His greatest hope, though this was not his firm prediction, was that a civilian elected president could succeed another, so that Argentina could begin to return to the peaceful and democratic traditions of the pre-1930s period.

I asked him about the Peronist movement and its future role. He said his remarks applied to the Peronists as well. Now the "Big Boss" was dead and the "lady who shares his name" was out of politics. Accordingly, there was no Peron who could choose party officials. The only way for them to be chosen legitimately now was through internal party democracy, and the

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party has said that it would have internal elections to choose new leaders.

There was always some danger of a coup, he said. The victory of the Peronists, or a Peronist government in power, might lead to coup efforts by certain portions of the military in cooperation with certain economic interests. The old economic oligarchy had the most to lose if labor unions came close to power. It was not inconceivable that shortly before an election in which a Peronist victory seemed assured, or at some point during Peronist rule there might be coup attempts.

I told the Ambassador that what we needed for certification was a period of quiet and steady human rights progress. He agreed, and said that he was sure the authorities would react with restraint when there are, for example, political marches and demonstrations. There would no doubt be setbacks, and unfortunate incidents, but the trend toward more and more free expression and toward free elections was unstoppable and would continue.

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